The Weekly Word
December 3-9, 2012

Advent began yesterday. Time for preparing for the birth of Jesus has begun! Happy reading…

Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link… http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/.

Monday, December 3: Zechariah 10 – Ask…

This chapter continues God's message of care for His people Judah. God will watch over them. God will care for them.

The very first word of the first verse drew me into thought. *Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime; it is the LORD who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone.*

Ask…

God is the maker of rain.God is the caretaker of Judah's fields and crops. God will care for them. And yet the first word of this chapter is 'ask.'

Ask…

It is as if God is saying ask for what you need. And isn't that precisely what Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you (Matthew 7:7)? Yes, God will care and God will watch over and God will provide… but there is something about asking…

It seems there is something about being so dependent that we ask for what we need and God longs to give.

I am not a good 'asker' of anyone, so this word and this devotion is a challenge for me. But not the kind of challenge that seems grueling or difficult. It is hard because it calls me to a new place in my walk and relationship with the Lord. I am feeling called to that place of asking for what I need, what I would generally simply assume God would provide.

I am being invited into the place of asking…

Lord, I ask for daily bread… Lord, I ask for safety for friends in Nigeria… Lord, I ask for my kids, jobs and… Lord, for my church growth…

Lord, I am learning to ask. Help me overcome self-reliance that is a barrier between me and a deeper relationship with You. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.

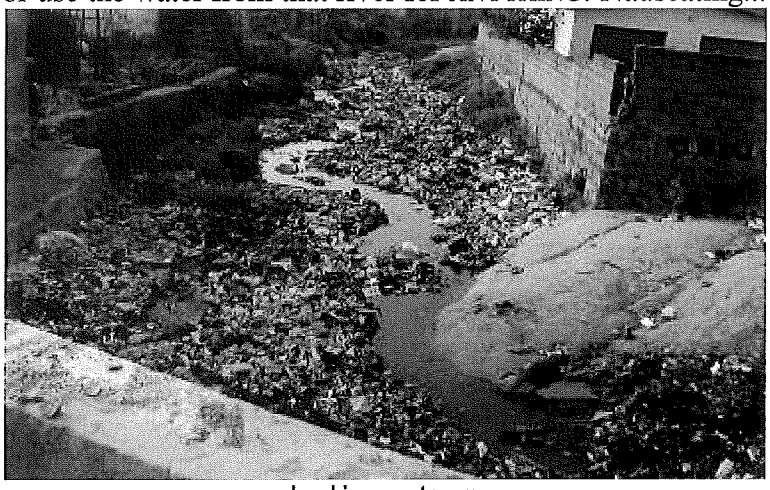
Tuesday, December 4: Zechariah 11 – God's Antithesis…

Sometimes seeing what is ugly or broken helps one to appreciate beauty.

I remember distinctly this river in Nigeria. Standing on the bridge looking down stream… the small stream flows irrigating some fields. Though a bit brown you can see how the constant flow of water feeds the otherwise dry land.

Looking down stream

Turning upstream, I was horrified! The extreme litter and garbage was disgusting. Who would ever go in that river or use the water from that river for ANYTHING! Nauseating...



Looking upstream

God pictures for the people the anti-shepherd. *For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs* (16). And then He pronounces His curse upon this anti-shepherd, *"Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded!"* (17).

Reading what this shepherd will be like helps me understand and appreciate all the more the gift of the Good Shepherd, Jesus who seeks the lost, heals the sick and cares for His flock even with His life…

Thank You, Oh Jesus, for being the Good Shepherd, for saving me, caring for me and all those of Your flock. I love and praise You, my Lord and my God. Amen.

Wednesday, December 5: Zechariah 12 – what is your life built upon?...

What is your security built upon? On what/who does your strength rest?

As Zechariah looks toward 'that' day he sees Jerusalem strong and secure. Her security and strength does not grow from an inner resolve or massive army or a protector nation like Egypt. Instead, Jerusalem's strength, security and protection comes directly from the Lord. *Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the LORD Almighty is their God'* (5).

How different that is from today. When I read the news about Israel, her strength today comes from her well-trained army, her consolidated front and the United States as her allies. Clearly today is not the day Zechariah envisions.

Zechariah's description of Judah in 'that' day draws me to contemplate where my security rests. Is my security built on my government for protection, for retirement (social security), for health care? Is my security resting on my medical insurance, my 401k and my portfolio? Is my security build upon my ability to make a buck, my frugality or my ingenuity?

These are difficult questions to answer, because certainly some of my security rests in these places. They are all factored into my life-long stewardship plan. But my questioning must go deeper still. If all of my answers begin with 'me' and 'my' then I must beware that I have built a 'house of cards' that could come tumbling down at any moment.

Supporting my stewardship hopefully is the Lord as the true foundation of my life. My life, if I am truly a Christ-disciple, rests in His care and watchful protection.

My life is His; my goal, His glory; my future in His hands...

Lord Jesus, Father Almighty, Holy Spirit, I pray this is so. I pray that my hope and future and life rests in You. Only then can I be content. Only then will I rest. Only then will I be greeted into eternity with the words I long to hear, 'well done good and faithful servant...'

I ,again today, pledge my allegiance to You, Lord God Almighty. Amen.

Thursday, December 6: Zechariah 13– In the lap of the Lord...

Zechariah has many prophecies that connect to Jesus... *strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered* (7) is mentioned in connection with Jesus' arrest in the garden.

It is wonderful to be connected to Jesus as I read The Word. Verse 7 brought me to Jesus, a wonderful place to hold my devotions.

Now connected with Jesus, verse 9 spoke to me. *They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'*

Calling on the Lord, that is what I am doing as I sit with God's Word... And God answers me, God sits with me. God calls me His own and reminds me that He is the Lord and He is my Lord. Oh, the wonder of sitting in the lap of my Lord God Almighty.

And this is where I spend my time this morning... in the lap, in the embrace, in the presence of the Lord!

Thank You and Bless You... Lord God Almighty, for who You are and for the all the time You incline Your ear to me... I am so blessed.

Lord, fill me with Your Holy Spirit that I might shout from the mountain tops, 'The Lord Reigns!' Blessed be the name of the Lord. Alleluia. Amen.

Friday, December 7: Zechariah 14– Holy/Wholly to the Lord…

As this chapter about what the Lord will do on 'that day' wound down the phrase HOLY TO THE LORD was in scribed on bells and pots (20).

I found myself glued to that phrase.

I found myself thinking, what if that were said of me and of the Church, what differences would be seen in the world. I also wondered what differences would there be if it were written WHOLLY TO THE LORD?

First and most importantly regarding me… Wow, what would it be like if I were HOLY & WHOLLY TO THE LORD? How would this affect my use of time, money, etc. I sat here for quite some time thinking and wondering. I wondered if my life would look more like Francis of Assisi. Then I thought,' no', I am married with children, so a monk is not my calling. Honestly, no role models came to mind, so I abandoned the idea of a quick answer.

I kept pondering. Purely selfish expenditures of time and money came to mind. Now here were some changes that likely would happen. Instead, 'God honoring uses' would be given to those time/money resources… and so my morning went.

What would it mean in your life if you were HOLY & WHOLLY TO THE LORD? Think about it.

Lord, to love You with heart and mind and soul and strength is Your desire. I fall so far short. Help me, strengthen me, teach me, encourage me… that I might be HOLY & WHOLLY to Yours. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen

Friends, Malachi, which we begin reading today is the last book of the Old Testament. Chronologically it is the last book as well. After Malachi there were 400 years of silence before God again spoke, this time through the incarnation of Jesus.

Saturday, December 8: Malachi 1– The best or not at all…

My talk with the Lord this morning revolved around the second section (verses 6-14). For me this section was summarized in verse 14 *"Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.*

God wants us to give our best to Him or nothing at all.

The picture Malachi paints is a clear bait and switch. The people have choice flocks, which they say they will offer to God, but at the time of the offering they substitute a lesser deformed animal. God says "NO WAY, your best or nothing!"

I don't use animal sacrifice, thankfully, so where does this touch my life? Do I talk myself into writing a lower amount on my weekly giving check because I think I can skate by? Is my devotional/prayer time with the Lord during my best time of the day or at some other time so that I can use my best time for work or play?

These are the kinds of thoughts I entertained as I listened to the Holy Spirit breath life into this text for me. Am I giving God my best or my leftovers???

Lord, You are God Almighty. Clearly You deserve the best. As Malachi says, 'Would you give that to the governor?' Forgive me when I choose to give You other-than my best, when I substitute something less than my best to You.

Wash me clean so that my life will honor You above everything else. Amen.

Sunday, December 9, 2012, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.